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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study designed to increase the psychological and educational knowledge of day care staff and develop content and methods appropriate for toddlers in day care settings. Preschool teachers and nursery nurses in three day care centers participated. They were interviewed at the beginning of the study, and 19 months later at the study's end. The interviews dealt with their experience of working with toddlers, expectations for the project, knowledge of child development, work as caregivers and educators, and attitudes toward work. At the beginning of the study, subjects attended a one-week course that covered theories and knowledge about child development and information about the Swedish preschool program. Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE), an intervention program based on adult mediation between the child's experiences and the surrounding environment, was implemented. Every four weeks, interactions between children and staff were videotaped and analyzed. Results indicated that MLE, and the teaching and guidance of the staff, increased the staff's capacity to interact in a stimulating way with children. The interview indicated changes in staff attitudes about the education of toddlers. Viewings of the videotapes enabled staff members to understand their own behavior and increased their ability to individualize and to take the viewpoint of the toddler. Appended are nine references. (GLR)

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INCREASING THE COMPETENCE OF STAFF DEALING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Introduction

Due to many factors, the numbers of toddlers involved in preschool (day care) from an early age in Sweden is increasing year by year. Firstly, over 85% of mothers of young children work outside the home. Secondly, society has assumed a major responsibility for ensuring that out of home care is available for working or studying parents with children over 1 1/2 years of age. The number of toddlers in preschool today varies greatly in different local authorities due to parental attitudes and to the availability of day-care centres. There is higher proportion of preschools in big cities than in small communities in the countryside. The proportion of toddlers in preschool varies. For the whole country it is 29% for children up to 3 (Statistiska centralbyrån, 1990).

During the last 15 years we have had a trend in Sweden towards extended sibling groups, (1-7 years, sometimes extended to 12 years). Recently, the mixed age groups and extended sibling groups have decreased in popularity. Neither the children below three nor the six-year-olds are considered to have the best care in groups in which there is a very wide age range. Grouping according to age has again become the rule, especially for children below three and more than seven (Sundell & Johansson, 1991).

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At the same time, while there are increasing numbers of toddlers in preschool, there is the problem of recruiting staff, especially for the youngest children. The reasons for this could be:
1) Working with toddlers can be physically more tiring than working with older children.
2) Education of preschool teachers focuses on older preschool children. The reason for neglecting knowledge about toddlers in education is not only the tradition, but also the fact that there is very little knowledge of and methods for the education of children below three.

Up to around 1975 only nursery nurses worked with toddlers in day care. At that time a government commission worked out new guidelines for the care and education of children below school age. A view of "edu-care" was presented, which means that not only care was important for toddlers, but also education. As a result of this view, preschool teachers were also employed to work with these young children. However, it is still considered to be of higher status to work with children over three in preschool!

The results presented in this paper are described in more detail elsewhere (Palmérus, Pramling, Lindahl, 1991).

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Effects on young children in day care

From our review of recent child development research, we now know how competent a newborn child is in many respects (Osofsky, 1989). Today we think that, from birth infants have the capacity to experience the world around them, as well as the capacity to adapt to the environment (Hundeide, 1989). But in order to develop, the child requires not only fulfilment of its biological needs, but also an adult who shows continuity, sensitivity and responsiveness towards it .

Studies on the effects of day care on child development often present contradictory results. Some report that children in day care are more aggressive than those cared for at home, while other studies have not found any differences (Belsky, 1989). Positive effects reported by American researchers are that day-care children often show better social skills, have a clearer notion of gender differences, are better skilled at developing role play, are more willing to co-operate and are better able to handle separation. Reported negative effects are increased aggressiveness and disobedience. Children in day care more than 20 hours/week more frequently had an insecure attachment to their mothers, which could later increase psychological problems (Farquhar, 1990).

One of the few longitudinal studies carried out in Sweden about effects of day care shows that the children who began at day care before the age of 1 year were the ones who became the best learners in primary school (Andersson, 1988).

Whether day care is good or bad for children is a question which will never fully be answered empirically. The effects of attending preschool already as a toddler will always depend on children's individual needs, but we believe that in order to fulfil these needs one of the most important aspects is the competence of the staff.

Aims

The aim of this research project is to increase the psychological and educational knowledge of the staff and to develop both content and methods appropriate for toddlers in day care settings. Our broad goal is to increase day care staff's awareness of young children's development and needs, as well as their awareness of their own behaviour.

Subjects and settings

Each of the three centres is situated in a suburb of Göteborg. The population mainly consists of workers and immigrants, most of whom live in big blocks of flats. The proportion of persons living on social welfare is comparably high. Two of the child groups, A and V, belong to larger day-care centres with 3 or 4 more groups, the third group, J, is on its own on the ground floor of a block of flats.

In A there are two preschool teachers and two nursery nurses in a group of 14 children between 1 and 4 years of age. In V, four nursery nurses take care of 14 children aged between one and three. In J, 16 children aged between 1 and 3 are taken care of by two preschool teachers and three nursery nurses. The work in groups A and V was already well organised when the project began. Group J started up at the same time as the project.

The preschool functions between 6.15 am and 6 pm. There are activity periods of 1 or 1 1/2 hours in the mornings and the afternoons. Most children take a nap after the main meal in the middle of the day. Most of the staff have been working in child care for more than five years. Only three had worked for less than two years when the project started.

Methods

All the staff were interviewed individually at the beginning and 19 months later, at the end of the project. The interview, which was carried out by the authors the first time and by an assistant the second time, dealt with the staff 's earlier experience of working with toddlers, their expectations of the project, their knowledge of child development, their tasks as care-givers and educators and attitudes to work.

As an introduction to the project, the staff attended a one-week education course full time. The course covered theories and knowledge concerning children's perceptual, cognitive, emotional and social development and information about the Swedish "Preschool programme" (Socialstyrelsen, 1987). Finally, the intervention programme "Mediated Learning Experiences" (MLE), developed by P. Klein (1989) in Israel, was introduced.

Every fourth week the interaction between children and every staff member was videorecorded and later analysed for all staff members in A, J and V respectively. The analysis was made in relation to the criteria of MLE and to the content and organisation visible in the video sequences. When the film was discussed with the staff, positive behaviour exhibited by staff was reinforced. We also discussed what could have been done differently and how to meet the child's "world" even better. This means that we sometimes focused on the adult's relation to an individual child and sometimes on a group of children. Both psychological and educational aspects were dealt with in the analysis.

"Mediated Learning Experience"

According to Klein (1989), working with "mediated learning experience" helps the child to become both more intelligent and sensitive to the world around it. She believes that love, security and care are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a child to develop its intellectual capacity. Instead, one ought to influence the child's need system in such a way that the child will become interested in the world around him or her and willing to learn about people and things. Children do not learn specific skills or knowledge in the programme, but they are given experience which creates a flexibility in their thinking. Children are not expected to learn specific facts but to learn a positive way to learn.

Children obviously also learn by doing and observing, but MLE deals with the aspect of learning where there is an adult mediating between the child's experiences and the surrounding environment. The mediator can choose the focus and create a frame of reference by connecting children's experiences in time and space. According to Klein (op cit), learning may be more easily achieved if there is an adult who consciously teaches the child. The five criteria used are content- and context-independent, which means that the content focused on by the mediator is relevant to the environment and values specific to the society of which the children are a part. Through "mediated learning experience" children are given the opportunity to share the adult's experience and knowledge and benefit from them.

The intervention technique of MLE is based on five categories, which are to some extent hierarchical. Category 1 presupposes the use of category 2, which pre-supposes the use of category 3. Category 4 and 5 need the presupposition of category 1, at least. The five categories are:

1.Intentionality and reciprocity

An adult interacting with a child generally has a more or less conscious intention of what to mediate to the child. The mediation could be cultural, value-related or informative ways to conceptualize the world around us. The adults' intention must be based on an understanding of the child. It is of no value to try to mediate something to the child which the child does not focus on. There has to be a reciprocity between the child and the mediator. The adult can give the child opportunities to recognize the world around him/her, by increasing the child's awareness and focusing on phenomena in the surroundings. Here we would like to emphasise that it is our belief that the more the adult is able to catch the child's attention and then focus on that, the better possibilities there are for an intervention.

2.Meaning

The phenomenon the adult's and the child's attention is directed towards must then get to mean something to the child. The child must get a label, notion or word for what he or she sees, to be able to compare this particular experience with other earlier experiences. When verbalizing and giving objects meaning, the adult also mediates values and emotional expressions. The adult could be the one giving meaning, but she can also be the one who asks questions and lets the child give the meaning.

3.Transcendence

To transcend means to expand and to go beyond the "here and now" situation and mediate knowledge which "this" situation could be connected with. In this way the child will see that nothing happens in a vacuum, but that it can be related to earlier experiences. The adult could be active, telling the child about different objects, tasks or situations, but the role of the adult could also be to put questions to the child and get him or her to think, remember or reflect, see similarities, differences, properties etc. The younger the child is the more the adult must be the person who does the verbal reflecting, but also the one who answers questions. The most important thing is the reflective attitude she mediates.

4.Feelings of competence

In order to feel competent, one must first of all be approved of/encouraged, which can be done by eye contact, words, play, mimics etc. Praise is an important activity in this category. This does not mean praise in general but specific and immediate praise related to the child's action. The child must be able to relate the praise to the actual situation. This is one aspect of giving children a feeling of competence, but the other side is even more important - to explain and motivate the child's feeling of competence. If the praise is to mean anything to the child, he or she must understand the experience to be able to learn from it.

5.Regulation of behaviour

To help the child to regulate its behaviour means to lead the child verbally or behaviourally so that he or she can solve a task. This also means to think and plan in advance and to look for different alternatives when solving a problem. The adult not only helps the child by informing and recommending but also by questioning,

stopping the child for a moment and pondering, giving clues to the child, or being a model. By regulating the speed and force of the child's action, the adult can help the child to plan its behaviour or regulate its impulsiveness. We see many similarities between this category and the Vygotskien notion of "scaffolding", in which the adult facilitates and teaches the child how to behave in different situations so as to utilise all the child's proximal zone of development (Linden, 1989).

Results

Interview:

From the pre and post interview results may be summarised in the following sentences.

Before the observation period the staff expressed:

- High expectations of the project, i.e. that they would become more fit to take care of toddlers.
- Care and routines are the main tasks of dealing with toddlers.
- 50% find it difficult to individualise.
- A wish to compensate for the stimulation and affection the toddlers cannot get at home.
- The main target is to get the toddlers to feel safe and to get along well in the day-care centre.
- To help the toddlers to form positive social relationships is more important than teaching them.
- Care is the most important task and if there is any time left, this can be used for education.

After the observation period the staff expressed:

- The observation and guidance period was a positive experience, which has given the staff a unified way of looking at toddlers.
- It is easier to cooperate between the staff members.
- Routine activities are used in a more stimulating way.
- Thanks to organising subgroups of toddlers, providing for individual characteristics was no longer a problem.
- Staff and parents fulfil different roles. Parents are more emotionally attached to the children. Staff stimulate the development of the children and interact according to prearranged schemes.
- Staff want to teach the toddlers and now have some knowledge of how to influence development in a positive way.
- Staff feel themselves to be mediating the development of the children and helping to open the eyes of the toddlers to their surroundings.
- The relationship between care and education is a result of how all the activities during the day have been carried out. Everything can be done in a pedagogical way.
- All staff members find themselves more aware of why they act in a special way. They also stress how they organise things differently in order to individualise and are able to meet the needs of the individual toddler more adequately. They find themselves more involved.
- All staff members express the usefulness of looking at themselves in videorecorded films, and how the possibility of reexperiencing the situations gives them a wider view of what has happened.

Analysis of the videofilms

The filmed sequences were coded according to the MLE criteria by an independent person. A note was made of each minute in which a certain category appeared on the film. The percentage of coded minutes in a sequence was calculated for each category. In the analysis the means for every staff member and every category were compared as well as the mean of the first third of the observations compared to the mean of the last third of the observations. Since some staff members had been absent on some occasions, a third could be two to four observations. The categories have been divided according to qualitative aspects, e.g. if the staff member or the child takes the initiative, if there is an explanation of the feeling of competence or regulation of behaviour. The meanings of the categories are:

* 1a Intentionality and reciprocity- the adult initiates or leads the interaction.
* 1t Intentionality or reciprocity- the toddler leads or initiates the interaction.
* 2n Meaning by naming
* 2q Meaning by questioning
* 3a Transcendence- adult telling
* 3r Transcendence - adult gets the toddler to reflect
* 4p Feeling of competence-praising the toddler
* 4e Feeling of competence- explaining, motivating the praise
* 5o Regulation of behaviour - ordering
* 5e Regulation of behaviour- explaining why

The table below presents a view of the pattern of the MLE categories, both for each member of staff and for the whole group.

Table 1. Means of MLE for the whole group (X) and for every staff member (J:, A:, V:), in proportion of observed time for all staff members and all categories. The staff are called J, A or V dependent on the centre they come from.

s/c	X	J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	A1	A2	A3	A4	V1	V2	V3	V4
1a	80	78	81	84	76	56	71	82	81	82	88	87	93	83
1t	33	35	51	38	37	24	38	33	38	34	33	25	18	23
2n	86	90	94	89	87	54	82	81	88	84	94	92	95	88
2q	65	63	57	57	51	48	61	67	67	72	76	81	67	76
3a	32	38	40	18	30	5	18	22	28	35	51	45	45	36
3r	16	18	25	9	10	0	11	10	13	13	22	26	28	25
4p	5	4	2	5	0	1	7	5	5	8	8	4	7	5
4e	14	7	7	18	9	8	6	12	6	16	17	17	12	13
5o	7	7	7	18	9	8	5	9	4	9	2	6	5	3
5e	11	19	16	13	10	15	19	19	12	7	7	13	18	8

Table 1 shows us that the most common categories are (1a) "intentionality and reciprocity" by the adult (80%) , (2n) "naming" (86%) and (2q) "naming" by questioning (65%). According to MLE these types of behaviour are the basis for stimulation.

A third of the observed time (1t) "intentionality and reciprocity" led and initiated by the child (33%) and (3a) "transcendence" (32%) are present.

Between 11 and 16 % (3r) "transcendence through reflection" (16%), (4e) motivated "feelings of competence"

(14%) and (5e) "regulation by explanation" (11%) is present.
(P) "unexplained praise" (5%) or (5o) "regulation" (7%) are the most rare categories.

There are large differences between staff members as well as between different situations for the same staff member (Palmérus et al, 1991). This stresses the importance of the activity in the observed situation.

The aim of the present study was to increase the skill of the caregivers. In order to find out if the staff have changed their behaviour, the means of the first third of the observations were compared to the means of the last third.

Table 2: Change in behaviour pattern over time for the whole group (X), and all staff members (J:, A:, V:,). The figures are the differences in the mean between the first third of the observations and the last third. * means preschool teachers, p= person , c= category of MLE.

p/c	X	J:1	J:2*	J:3	J:4*	J:5	A:1*	A:2	A:3	A:4*	V:1	V:2	V:3	V:4
1a	3	-8	+4	-8	-6	+5	+14	+10	-5	+12	+5	-3	+2	+20
1t	4	-1	+18	+22	+18	+38	-11	-7	+10	-9	+5	+3	-23	- 7
2n	2	-2	+7	-5	-6	+6	+-0	-4	-3	+18	+5	+12	-8	+-0
2q	4	+7	+4	+7	+24	+13	-11	+10	+1	-6	-12	-4	-5	+16
3a	18	+6	+16	+20	+47	-5	+25	+13	+27	+53	+23	-5	+9	- 4
3r	6	+28	+10	-4	+6	+-0	+9	+10	+11	+30	+16	-40	+7	-11
4p	-2	-+0	+3	-5	+-0	+4	-6	+8	-7	-21	+1	-1	+-0	+ 4
4e	8	+9	+9	+18	-1	+-0	+2	+19	+5	+18	+5	+6	+14	- 4
5o	1	+10	+6	-8	+2	+10	-7	-3	-4	-15	+3	+5	-2	+10
5e	9	+13	+18	+22	-1	+17	+9	+15	+20	-4	-3	+5	-7	+ 9

According to Table 2, the mean difference between the two periods increases between 1 and 18% for the different categories. "Transcendence" (3a) is the category which increased the most (18%). For one staff member it increased more than 50 %. This means that the staff members have learnt the MLE technique and adjusted their behaviour in accordance with it. "Regulation" and "feeling of competence" have increased 9 and 8 %. There have been many discussions in the guidance of the staff about toddlers' need of explanations, why they must do things in a different way or why they are good at something.

In the categories (3r) "transcendence" by reflection of the child and (1t) "reciprocity and intentionality" initiated or led by the child, the means have increased 6 and 5% respectively. For individual staff it has increased up to 30%. These categories are very important as they have the focus on the child and reflect the caregiver's sensitivity to the intention of the child and also to an understanding of the child. Categories with only a minor change (1 or 2%) are "(2n) meaning" by naming , (4p) unmotivated "feeling of competence" and (5o)"regulating" without explanation.

The staff have transformed their behaviour and developed their techniques, which means that they more often than before explain why something is good or must be done in a different way. They now follow the intention of the child and add an explanation to the naming of a subject.

Table 3. Sum of change per person and the mean change for the whole group.

J1	J2	J3	J4	J5	A1	A2	A3	A4	V1	V2	V3	V4	X
62	107	83	61	88	29	71	55	118	48	-22	-13	35	65
80					68				48				

According to Table 3, there are great variations in the behaviour change among the staff members in A, J and V. This is due to several factors. Group J began at the same time as the project and had no well functioning organisation from the start. Group V had the highest scores from the start and had comparatively high means during the whole period. Their behaviour change is only marginal and they have not been equally able to increase their use of categories which are specially sensitive to the intentions of the child. In group A the greatest change was seen in the two staff members who joined the project late, which means that they never participated in the first week of education.

The staff is composed of two categories, preschool teachers and nursery nurses. The preschool teachers have had a higher level of education, involving 2 1/2 years' teacher training, while the nursery nurses have attended a 2-year upper secondary school course. If the change is analysed according to the education of the staff member, the sum of the preschool teachers' categories was 84% in J and 74% in A, which gives a total mean of 79%. Looking at the nursery nurses, the mean of all categories was 78% in J, 63% in A, and 48% in V, which give a total mean of 63%.

The mean difference among the preschool teachers was 8 % and only 3 % among the nursery nurses. The variations among preschool teachers were between +2 and +15%. Among the nursery nurses the variation was between -3 and +9%. It seems as if the better educated staff members have included more of the programme in their activities than the less well educated ones.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this project was to increase the psychological and educational knowledge of the staff and to improve their interaction with the toddlers they care for.

The education course in the first week of the project taught the staff member about the capacity of toddlers and how to meet their needs. Staff members who joined the project after this first week had much poorer results at the first observation than the rest of the group. This means that in order to obtain a real baseline for the staff's behaviour we ought to have made the first videorecorded observations before the week of education. We believe that the improvement in the interaction of the staff with the toddlers is much greater than that presented in our results.

The MLE method and the teaching and guidance of the staff have increased their capacity to interact in a stimulating way with the children. According to the interviews, the staff members have changed their

opinion about the need of education for toddlers. The education course in the first week brought about a considerable change of attitude, but to change the style of their interaction with the children, they need to look at and analyse the videorecorded films. These enabled the staff members to understand their own behaviour, as well as providing them with a knowledge of positive and negative aspects of it. Their improved ability to individualise and to take the viewpoint of the toddler is very clear.

However, not all staff members have changed their interactive behaviour to the same extent. A few only improved the more mechanical categories "reciprocity and intentionality", as well as "naming". Some staff members also show less progress regarding their ability to focus on the child's needs and thinking.

The staff members who made most progress were often preschool teachers with a great interest in educational methods. This implies that there is a link between the educational level of the staff member and efficient use of the MLE method. efficiently. It also means that work with toddlers demands great ability and knowledge. Staff must be able to understand children who are not yet able to communicate verbally.

Our work with the staff in the child care centres often revealed poor organization. The discussions on the content of the videofilms have led to reorganisation of the structure of the work, and thereby increased the possibility of individualising and stimulating the toddlers in a better way. The work with MLE demands a firm organisation, where the staff members focus on how to stimulate the child. MLE does not mean that the staff member uses special equipment or material, but everything the staff members do is done in a conscious way and they benefit from every possible situation. Every interaction is used to improve the child's perception as well as its thinking. There is a risk with MLE of the adults becoming too active. Our results show how, in some situations, adults more frequently initiate or lead the interaction, giving less opportunity to the toddlers to initiate activities themselves. Klein herself (op.cit) says that 20% of MLE stimulation a day is enough.

In the work with toddlers in day care, staff members often look upon themselves as substitute mothers. In this project we have stressed the pedagogical aspects of child care. If we really try to fulfil the demands of *"educare"*, it is easy to understand the different effects of behaving like a mother or a staff member have on interaction with the child. In day care we cannot, and should not, substitute for the mothers. But if we develop and/or improve methods useful for care and education in groups of toddlers, we will be able to complement the work of the mothers and stimulate the development of the children in a profitable way.

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